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Not the weather again!

So many of my editorial contributions this year have been weather related, I'm beginning to question if my 'nose for news' is blocked.

Back when I was a newspaper cadet reporter, my grumpy sub-editor would look over his horn-rimmed spectacles on a slack news day and bellow "Newton, go and write a story about the weather or sewerage."

The weather I could understand, but sewerage? Years later, when I developed the brainpower to question such matters, I recall a media study which concluded that almost every newspaper in the country carried a daily story about, well, you know...human waste and where it goes.

This was back in the days when the traditional backyard dunny was being phased out and councils everywhere were digging up roads and front gardens to lay down sewerage pipes. Yes, sewerage was always big news and I've done my share of chain-pulling stories.

Enough toilet humour. Where was I? Oh yes, the weather. Maybe I spoke too soon when I revealed in my last column that I was a sort of global warming skeptic. The words were no sooner on my computer when summer came out of nowhere and the sky turned orange.

In my part of the world, September days were the warmest in six years, dominated by westerly winds which dragged in plenty of hot air from the interior. As if that wasn't enough, an El Nino pattern has now become established in the Pacific Ocean, and this will typically lead to above average temperatures across eastern Australia.

On top of that, I believe the U.S. press carried stories about our recent dust storms—those westerlies picked up tonnes of fine orange sand from the Simpson Desert and spread it liberally all over the eastern states from Melbourne to Cape York. I was attending a VASA board meeting in Sydney on the day the big storm hit. Our

Under the Southern Cross

famous Opera House, normally white, turned orange. Our meeting was in a building on Circular Quay, where all the ferries operate from, but I couldn't see the water. Neither could the ferry boat captains, so all the services were cancelled.

All this bad weather stuff is good news for the vehicle air conditioning industry. Members are reporting above average servicing of air conditioning systems so early in the season. Usually, Australia warms up for summer around November, with the hottest months being December to February. If only motorists would use the quieter winter months to have their servicing or repairs done, life would be a lot easier.

VASA is telling its members to gear up for a big season if the early high temperatures are any guide. The weather gurus are also warning of another bad bushfire season, and that has already started in Queensland.

The other big news for the air conditioning industry is the latest clamp-down on unlicensed technicians and workshops who are handling refrigerants with a high global

warming potential, like R-134a. I have previously reported on the new laws which require every workshop to display its refrigerant buying authorisation (AU) number on every piece of advertising.

This regime began on 1 July, and the Australian Refrigeration Council, which administers the licensing, has reported that drive-by auditing is picking up a lot of workshops which were trying to fly under the radar of the new legislation. How they can keep operating when they don't have an authorisation to buy the refrigerant raises other black-market questions.

In an unprecedented, and very welcome, move just recently the Refrigeration Council wrote to every advertising manager of every major media in the land, to warn them that any advertiser who offered air conditioning repair services without listing an AU number would be committing a federal offence.

The professionals in the industry are very grateful that the watchdog has at last grown some real teeth. ❄